WITHIN OUR BORDERS

The Mackenzie Highway
Tree Planting Progress
Wedding Anniversary Citation
Population Density

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Road To The Frontier

MACKENZIE HIGHWAY KEY TO OPENING OF NORTH

Path Of Settlement Moves North Along All-Weather Road Stretching 384 Miles From Grimshaw To Great Slave Lake

(This issue of Within Our Borders carries the first article of a series on the Mackenzie Highway. Other articles will appear in future issues.)

Alberta's great northern frontier has entered an era of development which has surpassed the great fur trading days of half a century ago. Agriculture, lumbering, oil development and fishing industries are pushing back the old frontiers and opening a new economic land for Alberta.

The key to the development of the north is the Mackenzie Highway — a 384-mile all-weather road which penetrates some of the most wild and unsettled areas in Canada. Through muskegs, jackpine ridges, sluggish creeks and rapid rivers the highway cuts a firm path to the very shores of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories.

The Highway was completed in 1948 under a Federal-Provincial agreement. The Alberta Government paid 52 percent of the construction cost for the 303-mile section within Alberta, while the 81 miles in the Northwest Territories were built by the Federal government.

The Alberta section is maintained by six crews from the Department of Highways, which keeps the highway in excellent condition both winter and summer.

The vast importance of the highway cannot be accurately measured in dollars and cents. Undoubtedly it has launched many new industries and promoted the expansion of existing businesses but more important, it has provided a link with civilization for the hundreds of people who have dedicated their lives to the north.

No longer does the trapper have to wait months for his shipment of goods. Nor does the farmer in the Fort Vermilion area have to ship his grain by boat to the elevators at Peace River. A sick child can be rushed to hospital in a matter of hours and a regular mail service brings the northern pioneers closer to the farms and fields of Alberta.

The two most important industries which depend upon the Mackenzie Highway are farming and fishing. These industries are at opposite ends of the road. Almost all of the fish comes from Great Slave Lake at the northern terminal, while the bulk of the farming takes place on the first 70 miles of the highway.

The Fort Vermilion area also plays a prominent part in Alberta's agricultural life. It was here the early fur traders discovered that the rich soil could grow excellent vegetables and it was here that many of Alberta's championship grains were grown. It became a vital supply point during the Klondyke gold rush days, when the wheat was ground into flour at the local mills and shipped to the northern miners.

Population of 300

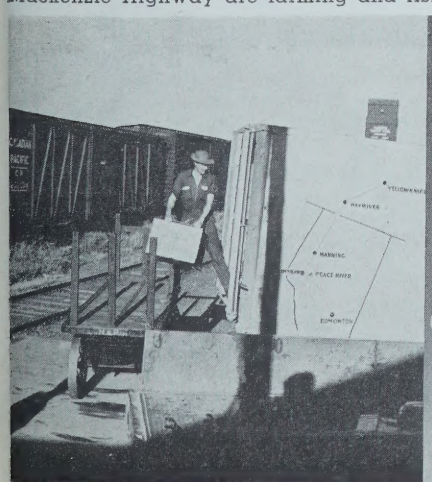
Today the town has a population of about 300 and is a mixture of the old and the new. On the north bank of the Peace are the trading stores and Indian cabins, while the agricultural town is on the south. Here there are general stores, implement dealers, cafes, churches and dwellings.

There are about 400 farms in the Fort Vermilion area which cultivate about 50,000 acres of land. Flax and forage seed are the primary cash crops, with wheat, oats and coarse grains also grown. The livestock industry is becoming increasingly important and most mixed farmers are relying more and more on their cattle and hogs.

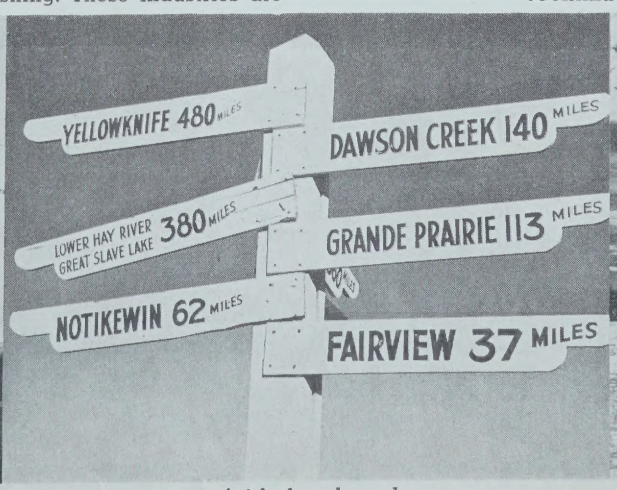
Besides the area already under cultivation, it has been estimated that there are another 3,000,000 acres of arable land in the Fort Vermilion district.

The fort is about 50 miles by district road from the junction with the Mackenzie Highway at High Level. The local road passes the rich farming country, the neat log cabins and log barns of older homesteaders and the frame buildings of the modern settlers. It passes the homes of the northern Indians who have found that farming provides a surer living than trapping. The road reaches the Peace River at one of its widest points where a ferry makes the quarter mile voyage to the opposite shore.

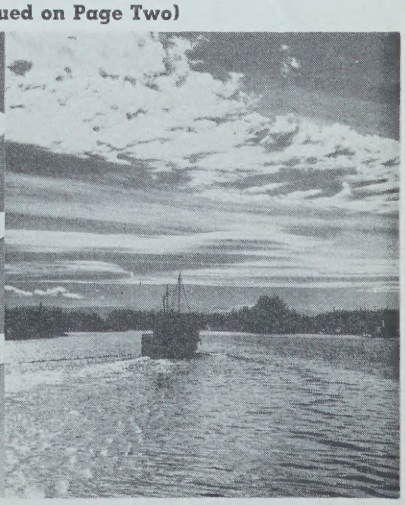
(Continued on Page Two)



Goods are loaded on a truck at Grimshaw . . .


YELLOWKNIFE 480 MILES
DAWSON CREEK 140 MILES
LOWER HAY RIVER GREAT SLAVE LAKE 380 MILES
GRANDE PRAIRIE 113 MILES
NOTIKEWIN 62 MILES
FAIRVIEW 37 MILES

. . . freighted north on the Mackenzie Highway . . .



. . . and transferred to an Arctic-bound boat.

Mackenzie Highway

(Continued From Page One)

Since the Mackenzie Highway was opened in 1948, the boats operating between Fort Vermilion and Peace River town have been becoming less and less frequent as trucks replace the slower river traffic. Commercial river men have seen that the old days are gone and this year the Hudson's Bay Company announced the last trip for its big freighting boat the "Watson Lake."

A typical homesteader in the Fort Vermilion farming area is Dick Olsen. He lives about 20 miles from the Mackenzie Highway and uses High Level as his post office. The young Canadian-born Scandinavian served overseas throughout most of the Second Great War, then lived in central Alberta. While he was working as a trucker in Edmonton, he decided to go north and be his own boss.

He said he had become "fed up" with all the talk of atom bombs, taxes and the high cost of living, so he filed a homestead lease in the wilderness.

Dick Olsen took off his first crop this fall and plans to stay. His modern house is almost finished and he is gradually pushing back the bush, grubbing out roots and breaking the land. The only difficulty is the 13 miles his daughter would have to travel to school. He says this is too far in such an unsettled country, so instead she is taking a correspondence course.

Encounters With Bears and Wolves

It's the sort of a life that would appeal to a man who wants to get away from city life. A few weeks ago he had some trouble with a bear around his house and before that a couple of mad timber wolves approached him as he was working in the field. The young homesteader was armed with only an axe and was relieved when the rabid beasts did not attack. Usually these animals, which are heard howling at night, are seldom seen. But now that an epidemic of rabies is sweeping the fox and wolf population in the area, Mr. Olsen and other farmers have to carry rifles when they work in the fields.

The Fort Vermilion area has expanded since the opening of the Mackenzie Highway. The Mennonites have opened a large section south of the river and a new homesteading area is being developed at Buffalo Prairie. Now an experimental station at the fort is developing grain and plants which will thrive in the northern climate and will ripen before the early frosts.

In the autumn, the large grain trucks wind their way past the farms and homesteads to the highway, on the 235-mile trip to the elevators at Grimshaw. It's a long haul, but better than the old system of boat traffic.

The farming area on the southern stretch of the Mackenzie Highway may not be so far removed from civilization, but it is still a land of pioneers and homesteads.

The Homesteaders

Since the turn of the century, men who saw that someday the wild bushland would be transformed into modern farms, pushed north of Peace River to establish their tiny homesteads. Each year they were joined by more homesteaders who were willing to carve a living from the bush in the hope that they would not always be isolated.

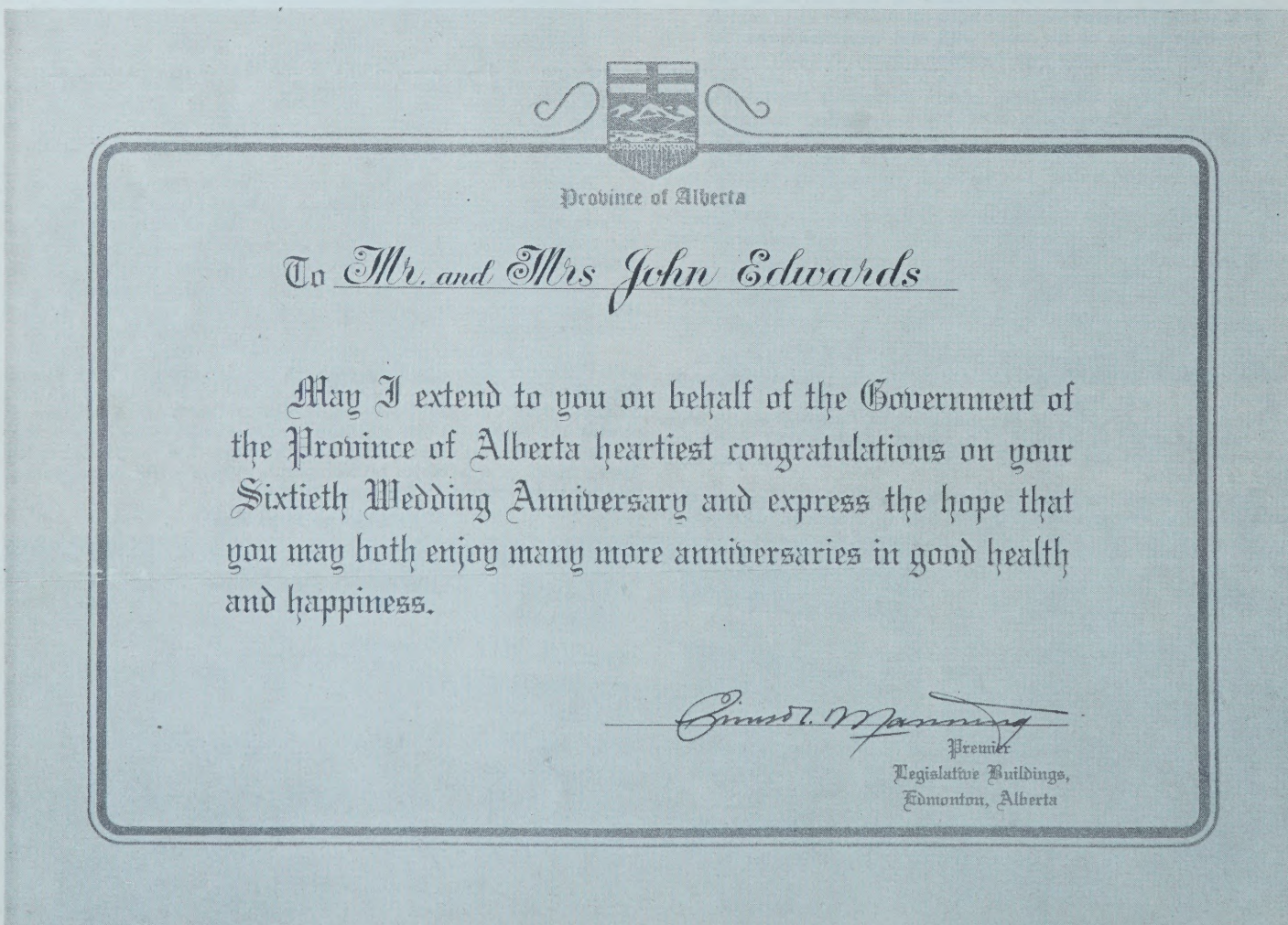
They have seen this dream come true and today make a vital contribution to the agricultural importance of Alberta. The elevators at Grimshaw last year handled 1,650,000 bushels of grain—the largest of any single town in the Province. At least 1,320,000 bushels or 80 percent of this volume came to the elevators via the Mackenzie Highway.

Wheat is the main crop, with large amounts of flax, barley, rye, oats and grass seeds also taken. In September of 1952 alone, almost 200 freight cars loaded with grain were shipped from Grimshaw, making another new record for the town.

Six Elevator Companies

The six elevator companies operating at Grimshaw have built new elevators and annexes to house the increasing shipments of grain. One company alone, which now has an elevator capacity of 890,000 bushels, has constructed one new elevator and added an annex to their old building since the opening of the north country.

The Mackenzie Highway has also become the trail of the homesteaders. A new settlement area was opened this spring north of the Third Battle River and other areas, surveyed some time ago, have been in demand at Buffalo Prairie, and points along the highway. Within the past year more than 3,500 homesteads were filed in the Peace River district, of which a large portion came from the area served by the highway. ●


Province of Alberta
To Mr. and Mrs John Edwards
May I extend to you on behalf of the Government of the Province of Alberta heartiest congratulations on your Sixtieth Wedding Anniversary and express the hope that you may both enjoy many more anniversaries in good health and happiness.
Premier
Legislative Buildings,
Edmonton, Alberta

Alberta couples celebrating their 50th and 60th wedding anniversaries will receive congratulatory citations (above) from the Government of Alberta. The citations, signed by the Hon. E. C. Manning, Premier of Alberta, and decorated in silver leaf for the 50th anniversary and gold leaf for the 60th anniversary, are suitable for framing. Couples eligible for citations are asked to notify the Premier's Office, Legislative Buildings, Edmonton.

The Alexandra Falls

One of the most beautiful sights to be seen on the Mackenzie Highway is the Alexandra Falls. This impressive waterfall, located near Mile 350, drops 109 feet from the quiet Hay River into a roaring, foaming gorge.

It still remains in its unspoiled beauty, with only a deserted cabin and a roadside sign marking the presence of man. The tall pines crowd to the edge of the chasm and only a few well-worn trails lead to choice view points.

An impression of the size of the waterfall can be seen in the above photograph where a man (arrow at right) is dwarfed by the immensity of the roaring falls and sheer cliffs.

The area is of a limestone formation and the sight of these impressive falls is incongruous in such a flat area. Upstream from the falls are foaming swirling rapids which warn a boatman that danger lies ahead.

In the 1920's two youths ignored the warning of the rapids and their light canoe plunged over the falls, carrying both occupants to their death. The grave of one of the youths can be seen farther along the highway.

Below the falls the cliffs are as sheer as the side of a wall and drop more than 120 feet to the water below. Over the years some of the walls have crumbled into the water until today there is a small tree-covered bank at the base of the cliffs.

The sheer walls border the river for several miles and about three miles downstream are the Louise Falls, a smaller sister of the Alexandra. These other falls, which are only 46 feet high, are not visible from the highway and would require a mile's trek through the wilderness to reach them. ●

Nearly Two Million Trees Planted By Farmers This Year

Alberta farmers, in 1952, planted 1,930,020 trees from the Provincial nurseries at Oliver and Brooks, and the Dominion Forest Nursery Station at Indian Head, Saskatchewan. This is an increase of 267,782 over the 1951 total.

At Oliver alone, 430 applications were received from farmers throughout the Province. This shows an encouraging response to the Alberta Department of Agriculture's objective of 100,000,000 trees planted in 25 years. Most popular trees in 1952 were caragana, Manitoba maple, poplar, willow, American elm, green ash and evergreens.

The government tree planting program recommends three types of tree planting for farm protection. They are roadside planting, shelterbelts and farmstead windbreaks. Roadside planting, when trees are planted at least 100 feet behind surveyed fence lines, reduces snow drifting on the roads. Shelterbelts reduce erosion and excessive evaporation, protect the crops from wind and keep the snow from melting and running off too quickly in the spring. Farmstead windbreaks protect farmsteads from the cold, reducing fuel costs and increasing the comfort of farm living.

To encourage farmers in their tree planting program, the Department of Agriculture held 84 tree planting demonstrations at strategic points throughout the Province this year. Two tree planters visited such places as Hanna, Lethbridge, Leduc, Lloydminster, Three Hills, Claresholm, Olds, Ponoka, Vermilion and Wainwright, planting 175,000 trees and explaining the necessity for plenty of well-planned stretches of trees on the farm. ●

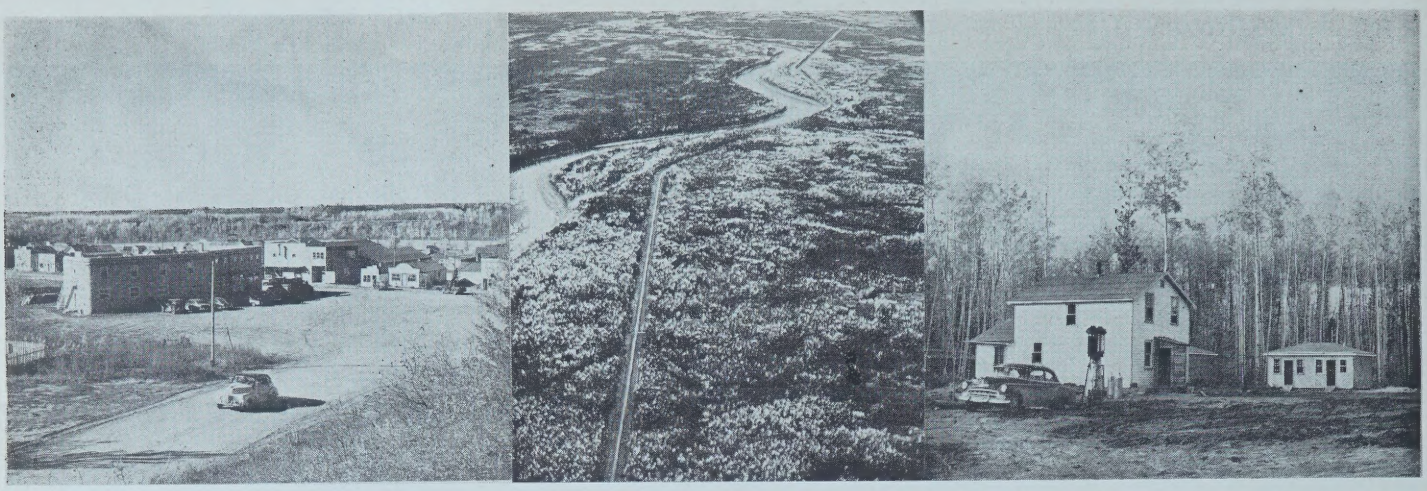
Alberta Population Density Averages 3.68 Persons

Alberta's average population is 3.68 persons per square mile according to the 1951 census report. In a total area of 255,285 square miles, there were 939,501 persons.

Population density is greatest in the Edmonton area with 48.7 persons to the square mile, while the Calgary area is second with 19.38 persons per square mile. Survey of the Edmonton area covers 4,644 square miles surrounding the city, with boundaries on the south running through Millet, north through Bruderheim, Tofield on the east and Wabamun to the west. The Calgary area covers 10,080 square miles, from irregular lines extending north of Olds, east to Drumheller, west to the B.C. boundary and just south of the city of Calgary.

The Lethbridge-Cardston area is next in population density with 11.68 persons to the square mile and the Red Deer-Camrose area follows closely with 11.23 persons per square mile. Population is thinnest in the Fort McMurray-Vermilion area where only .106 persons inhabit a square mile. This means that each resident in this area has close to 10 square miles on which to live.

The largest single age group in the province are those who are four and under. They total 116,846. Taking each successive five years as a group, there are three groups of school age, numbering 243,901, almost 26 percent of the total population in Alberta. Of these totals, 146,162 are rural residents, while 97,739 school age children live in cities and towns. Edmonton has 19,819 children aged four and under, and 33,947 children in the three groups making up the school age population. Calgary has 14,413 children four and under and a school age population of 24,352. ●



Two northern settlements which owe their success to the Mackenzie Highway are Manning and High Level. At left, is the modern town of Manning with the hotel in the foreground. Centre is an aerial view of the highway in extreme northern Alberta. It cuts straight through the wilderness near the winding Hay River. At right is High Level, located almost 50 miles from the nearest permanent settlement. Left is the cafe and general store while at right are two of the motel accommodations.

Great Future Predicted For Northern Settlements

In the extreme north-western section of Alberta there are two settlements which owe their success to the vital Mackenzie Highway. These are Manning and High Level—two points so new that they aren't listed on most maps.

Manning has a population of 600 and High Level a population of 15, but the people in both centres have a great faith in Alberta's north and fully expect to see large towns or even cities arising from their frontier homes.

Manning is located in a beautiful spot at the bend of the Notikewin or Battle River and was named in honor of Hon. E. C. Manning, Premier of Alberta. A wide flat valley with its shimmering wheat fields bounds the thriving village on two sides, while the river flows quietly along the southern outskirts.

It lies in the centre of an expanding agricultural district and is the main supply centre for new farmers and homesteaders. In addition, it is a vital point on the Mackenzie Highway and boasts the only regular hotel on the 384-mile stretch of road between Grimshaw and Hay River.

But before 1947, there was little more at this spot than a hospital and a few houses. When the highway crossed the valley it brought new hope to the area and soon the new village began to appear. First came the hotel, which was soon followed by many businesses which are important to an agricultural town.

Today there are drug stores, grocery stores, hardwares, garages, machine shops, restaurants, bakery, lumber yard, banks, post office, furniture store, butcher shops, implement dealers, jeweller, clothing stores and just about every type of business found in a modern town.

High Level, at Mile 183 on the Mackenzie Highway, is in many ways similar to Manning. It has seen the new road bring an era of development to the north, and it is a settlement which sees a bright future ahead for its district.

But it is also very different from Manning in that it lies in the centre of a wilderness, 46 miles from the nearest permanent settlement. It thrives now as a supply centre and stopover for vehicles travelling to Hay River or Fort Vermilion.

The builder of High Level is James Jones, who heard about the highway while operating three trading posts in the Aklavik area on the Arctic coast. He had decided to move farther south but did not want to get into the really civilized country. When a bush pilot told him about the wonderful possibilities of the Mackenzie Highway, Mr. Jones looked over the area and chose the Fort Vermilion junction as the site for his motel.

That was in 1950. Now the settlement consists of a motel, cafe, general store, and gas pump. Mr. Jones is just putting the finishing touches to a log garage and hopes to have it operating by winter.

His motels are built in the real style of the north—there are no locks on the doors. This is typical of the true north where no man locks his cabin door, but Jones' two-roomed suites are modern in that they have propane heating and lighting systems.

At all hours of the day and night, trucks pull up to a stop in front of the gas pump; then drivers eat a "home-cooked" meal while the truck is being refuelled.

James Jones sees a great future ahead for this country. He says there is plenty of good soil in the unsurveyed area around his settlement and sees an agricultural future for High Level. ●

Teachers Sent Educational Aids By Government Service Bureau

An estimated 15,000-20,000 new booklets covering courses of study for Alberta schools are being distributed by the Teachers' Service Bureau, Department of Education, this year.

These booklets include the courses of study to be followed for each new subject or revision in elementary, junior high and senior high schools. Edited by the Bureau, they have increased in number this term because of the changes in curriculum.

The Teachers' Service Bureau is primarily interested in supplying Alberta teachers with educational information and program study aids, but it also answers requests from students whenever possible. Last year, the Bureau sent out 30,000 pamphlets and answered over 1,000 requests for single items of information. Questions and requests came from both teachers and pupils and ranged from "How to you write 10,000 in Roman numerals?" to "Who was the first Premier of Alberta?" The Bureau keeps standard reference material on hand for this purpose.

Pamphlets of educational value, printed by commercial companies, associations and other government departments, are distributed to the schools in the Province. Fire prevention manuals, "The Alberta Story," and back copies of the Canadian Geographical Journal are just a few of the items available through the Teachers' Service Bureau.

As a further assistance to teachers, the Bureau has published a book entitled "Classroom Aids for Teachers." This book lists sources of free and inexpensive materials for use in the classroom and is distributed, as all other material from the Bureau, through the Divisional Superintendents of Schools in the Province.

The supervisor of the Bureau directs the evaluation of educational materials for the elementary school. While many kinds of material are evaluated in his office, texts and reference books are referred to the Provincial Elementary Curriculum Committee and its various subcommittees. ●

"Within Our Borders" is a publication designed to acquaint the people of the Province with the administration and services of the Alberta Government.

It is believed the many and varied services of the Government will be effective in the degree they are known and used.

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Correspondence should be addressed to "Within Our Borders," Legislative Buildings, Edmonton.

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